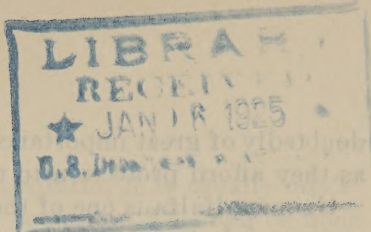


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S. D.—93. [This leaflet is distributed only with the seeds to which it relates.]

## United States Department of Agriculture,

### BUREAU OF PLANT INDUSTRY,

New and Rare Seed Distribution.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

## ALFALFA.

**OBJECT OF THE DISTRIBUTION.**—The distribution of new and rare seeds has for its object the dissemination of new and rare crops, improved strains of staple crops, and high-grade seed of crops new to sections where the data of the Department indicate such crops to be of considerable promise. Each package contains a sufficient quantity for a preliminary trial, and where it is at all practicable the recipient is urged to use the seed for the production of stocks for future plantings. It is believed that if this practice is followed consistently, it will result in a material improvement in the crops of the country.

Please make a full report on the inclosed blank regarding the results you obtain with the seed.

### DESCRIPTION.

According to the account published by the Bureau of Plant Industry in Bulletin No. 209, Grimm alfalfa was introduced into this country in 1857 by Wendelin Grimm, an immigrant from Baden, Germany. The original introduction consisted of less than half a bushel of seed, which was sown by Mr. Grimm in 1858 on his farm in Carver County, Minn. Opinions seem to differ as to the hardiness of the original lot of seed. However, its progeny contained many individuals which were sufficiently hardy to withstand the severe winters to which they were subjected. Careful investigations pretty definitely indicate that Grimm alfalfa owes its superior hardiness to the facts that it is the result of a natural cross between the common variety and the yellow-flowered alfalfa (*Medicago falcata*) and that by virtue of its being exposed to numerous severe winters the weaker plants were eliminated, leaving only the hardy ones to perpetuate the strain.

Grimm alfalfa does not differ materially in appearance from the ordinary strain, so that the casual observer has difficulty in distinguishing one from the other. While a large percentage of its flowers are of the same color as those of common alfalfa, there are some that represent many shades of violet, yellow, and other hues. The taproots show a tendency to branch, and the crowns are inclined to be low set and spreading. These characters of the crown are un-



doubtedly of great importance in rendering a variety resistant to cold, as they afford protection to the buds which produce the new shoots.

Grimm alfalfa is one of the hardiest, if not the most hardy, of our commercial strains. It is recommended for the northern portions of the Great Plains region and parts of the Northwest where the winters are especially severe and where little protection is given by snow. In sections where winterkilling is not an important consideration, it is not thought to be materially superior to common alfalfa, and in some cases it is not quite equal to that variety in point of yield. It possesses, however, the advantage of starting earlier in the spring than common alfalfa, and, as a consequence, usually has more moisture upon which to make the first crop. This normally insures one good cutting, which is a very important consideration in the dry, short-season sections where subsequent cuttings can not be depended upon.

When this variety first began to attract attention its seed was produced entirely in Minnesota, but as conditions are not favorable for seed production in that State stock seed was sent to Montana and other States farther west in order that the available supply might be more rapidly increased. Tests of the true variety grown in Dakota, Montana, and Idaho indicate that these lots are all of equal value and are quite as hardy as those grown in Minnesota. The supply of seed has been very limited, and the seed has always commanded a high price. For this reason unscrupulous dealers have offered for sale large quantities of the seed of common alfalfa under the name of Grimm, and on account of this practice it is highly desirable that each prospective purchaser take every means possible to learn whether seed is true to name before purchasing.

#### PREPARATION FOR SOWING.

Grimm alfalfa requires practically the same soil and culture as ordinary alfalfa, i. e., it requires a fertile soil and a well-prepared seed bed. Where spring sowing is practiced it is advisable in most cases to plow the ground which is to be sown to alfalfa during the preceding fall, leaving it rough in order to hold the snow and prevent blowing. One of the chief advantages of fall plowing is that it permits the ground to become thoroughly settled before the time of sowing. If alfalfa is to be sown on land that has been in corn or potatoes, plowing in the fall is not necessary. Such ground can be put into excellent condition for sowing by thoroughly disking and harrowing in the spring. Ground that has been plowed in the fall should be given repeated diskings and harrowings in the spring until the subsurface has been well settled. This treatment also induces the germination of weed seeds and destroys many of the weed seedlings.



### INOCULATION.

Unless the ground has recently grown alfalfa, it is usually advisable to inoculate it with nitrogen-fixing bacteria. This can be done by scattering over the area to be sown soil from a field upon which the crop has been previously grown successfully. From 300 to 500 pounds per acre are usually sufficient and should be harrowed in immediately upon application, to prevent injury to the germs by the action of the sunlight. Another method which is also used is that of inoculating the seed with artificial culture, which can be secured free of charge from the United States Department of Agriculture. Full directions for use accompany each bottle of the culture.

### SOWING.

In the Northwest there is generally no advantage to be gained by sowing alfalfa before the middle of May, and in most cases sowing early in June gives entirely satisfactory results. In the Northeast the most successful stands are secured from sowings made late in June or as soon thereafter as moisture conditions are favorable. It is seldom safe to sow later than August 15.

Whether alfalfa seed should be sown with a nurse crop is a question upon which there is some difference of opinion. In general, however, a nurse crop is a detriment and does not furnish the help that it is intended to give. The chief advantage of a nurse crop is that it is a substitute for weeds, and on land that is very foul its use is sometimes advised. Barley is probably the best crop to use for this purpose, and in all cases it should be sown lightly and cut for hay rather than for grain.

The use of the press drill is advised in preference to the broadcast method of sowing, since by the use of the drill a uniform stand is more certain to be secured. However, if the drill is not available, a wheelbarrow seeder or one of similar type can be used quite satisfactorily. From 10 to 15 pounds of good seed in the West and 20 to 25 pounds in the East are ample for sowing 1 acre, and on thoroughly prepared land no advantage is gained by using a greater quantity. The seed should be covered evenly, but not deeper than  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches in light soil; in clay soils one-half of this depth is sufficient.

### CULTIVATION OF OLD FIELDS.

There is not sufficient evidence regarding the value of cultivating broadcast fields to warrant definite recommendations. However, disking and harrowing should be tested thoroughly, leaving in each case a portion of the field untreated to serve as a check on the cultivated area. The spike-tooth harrow appears to give good results for the first and possibly the second season. After this the use of an

"alfalfa harrow," which is a modified form of the spring-tooth harrow, is probably more satisfactory. Severe treatment should not be given, as it injures the crowns of the plants and promotes the introduction of disease.

#### SUGGESTIONS.

If further information is desired, the following publications, which will be mailed by the Secretary of Agriculture free upon application, discuss in much detail the various subjects contained in this circular, and it is suggested that those who are interested apply for them at once: Farmers' Bulletins Nos. 757, Commercial Varieties of Alfalfa; 1229, Utilization of Alfalfa; and 1283, How to Grow Alfalfa.

NOVEMBER 5, 1923.